

Evidence Gap

Plain-English thesis

Digital harassment often happens across messages, accounts, locations, and time, so preserved context can matter as much as any single screenshot.

Why ordinary people should care

Many people are told to "save the screenshots" when they are harassed online. That advice is practical, but it is not always enough.

Harassment may move across social platforms, text messages, email, fake accounts, location tools, and workplace or school channels. The harm is often a pattern, not one post.

Ordinary people should care because a person trying to get help may be asked to explain a timeline that platforms, devices, and message threads were never designed to preserve as one coherent record.

What the real-world problem looks like

Pew Research Center found that 41 percent of U.S. adults had experienced online harassment and 25 percent had experienced more severe forms such as stalking, physical threats, sexual harassment, or sustained harassment. [S7]

The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated 3.4 million stalking victims age 16 or older in 2019, and less than a third reported the victimization to police. [S8]

The CDC describes stalking tactics that can include GPS tracking, technology-assisted contact, and being watched or spied on through technology. [S9] The evidence problem is that the pattern may be real even when the record trail is scattered.

What current systems usually leave behind

- Screenshots of posts, messages, or profiles.
- Platform reports and moderation responses.
- Phone logs, email threads, and blocked-number lists.
- Police reports or victim service notes, when a report is made.
- Personal timelines written by the target after the fact.

Why reconstruction is weaker than preserved evidence

Screenshots can help, but they can lose surrounding context: account identity changes, deletion timing, whether the message was edited, which platform it came from, and how separate incidents connect over time.

Preserved evidence matters because harassment and stalking are often pattern-based. A reliable timeline can help a target, advocate, platform, employer, school, or investigator see the pattern without asking the harmed person to carry the whole evidentiary burden alone.

Where AuditTrace Labs / Project Aingeal fit

AuditTrace Labs should speak carefully in this area. The public lane is not broad collection about other people and not a general activity record. It is user-controlled preservation of relevant evidence when meaningful digital events need later review.

Project Aingeal fits only in that restrained sense: preserved context can help make a pattern easier to review without turning evidence preservation into broad observation of people.

This brief should be used to show why preserved context matters in human terms, while keeping safety, consent, and lawful access at the center.

What should change going forward

Platforms, devices, and support systems should make it easier for people to preserve relevant context when they are harmed, while respecting privacy and lawful boundaries.

Public language should avoid promising outcomes. The better standard is practical: make the record clearer so people seeking help are not forced to rebuild the entire pattern alone.

Closing

In digital harassment, the evidence is often the pattern. Preserving context can make that pattern easier to see, explain, and review.

Three reusable pull quotes

A screenshot can show a moment. Preserved context can help show the pattern.

The person harmed should not have to become the entire evidence system.

Digital harassment is often fragmented by design.

Five plain-English FAQs

Is this about following a person online?

No. The public lane is preserving user-controlled evidence relevant to meaningful events, not following people online.

Are screenshots still useful?

Yes. Screenshots can be useful, but they are often only one piece of a larger timeline.

Can preserved evidence prove a case?

It can support review, but outcomes depend on platform rules, workplace policies, law enforcement, courts, or other decision-makers.

Why does context matter?

Because harassment often involves repeated actions across multiple places. Context helps show the pattern.

What should public language avoid?

Avoid claims that sound like watching people, identifying every person, or replacing legal or victim-support processes.

LinkedIn-ready excerpt

Digital harassment is often not one message. It is a pattern across platforms, accounts, texts, timing, and context. "Save screenshots" is useful advice, but it can leave people doing reconstruction alone. AuditTrace Labs and Project Aingeal are building public language around preserved evidence and context where later review matters.

Website-ready excerpt

Cyberstalking and digital harassment expose a human evidence gap: the harmful pattern may be real while the records remain scattered. AuditTrace Labs and Project Aingeal support public-safe framing around user-controlled preservation of relevant context for trustworthy later review.

Selected public sources

[S7] Pew Research Center, The State of Online Harassment

Found that 41 percent of U.S. adults had experienced online harassment, with 25 percent experiencing more severe forms.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/01/13/the-state-of-online-harassment/>

[S8] Bureau of Justice Statistics, Stalking Victimization, 2019

Estimated 3.4 million stalking victims age 16 or older in 2019; less than a third reported to police; 67 percent of victims of both traditional and technology-facilitated stalking feared being killed or physically harmed.

<https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/stalking-victimization-2019>

[S9] CDC, Stalking overview

Describes stalking tactics including GPS tracking and technology-assisted contact; notes lifetime prevalence of about 1 in 5 women and 1 in 10 men.

<https://www.cdc.gov/intimate-partner-violence/about/about-stalking.html>